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Stephen P. Demanchick and Howard Kirschenbaum

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CARL ROGERS AND THE CIA



STEPHEN P. DEMANCHICK, PhD, is an assistant professor in the creative arts therapy department at Nazareth College in Rochester, New York. He is developing an observational assessment designed to measure therapist behaviors in child-centered play therapy. His clinical interests include play therapy, supervision, and school-based prevention.



HOWARD KIRSCHENBAUM, EdD, is professor emeritus and former chair of Counseling and Human Development, Warner Graduate School of Education, University of Rochester, New York. He is author or editor of 22 books on psychology, education, and history, including *The Life and Work of Carl Rogers*, *The Carl Rogers Reader*, and *Values Clarification*, and numerous professional articles. Kirschenbaum and Demanchick's video titled

Carl Rogers and the Person-Centered Approach is used in more than 600 colleges, universities, and training institutes worldwide.

Summary

Carl Rogers was a pioneer and leader in the humanistic psychology movement. Although his many professional activities and accomplishments are well known, the story of his association with the Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology—a front organization for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)—is barely known and has never been explored in any depth. This article attempts to tell that story in the context of America during the 1950s, Rogers's academic career, and the mission of the CIA.

Keywords: *Carl Rogers; CIA; secret; human participants; person centered*

Week after week, young, handsome Charles Van Doren mesmerized the nation as he nervously stood in a soundproof booth apparently struggling to conjure up correct answers to a host of questions, eventually winning the unheard-of sum of \$129,000 on the television quiz show *Twenty-One*. Only later did the truth come out that Van Doren was briefed on the answers to the questions beforehand by the show's producers, landing him in the middle of a wider scandal that sparked a congressional investigation (Donaldson, 1997). No problem—elsewhere in America, other, even greater heroes such as James Dean, Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe, and Willie Mays continued to capture the hearts of many. The economy boomed, new highways proliferated, and the safe, quiet refuge of suburban life blossomed. It was a golden age—America in the 1950s.

In a country where radio, newspapers, and magazines had been the dominant media, 1950s America was swept away by the entertaining sounds and pictures emanating from black-and-white television sets. By 1959, 44 million U.S. homes had a TV! (O'Neill, 1986). Shows such as *Father Knows Best*, *Ozzie and Harriett*, *I Love Lucy*, and *Dobie Gillis* depicted a wholesome, mainly White, and clean-cut America.

Beneath the idealized media portrayal of American life, however, lurked a strikingly different portrait of a nation. There was “the other America” of widespread poverty (Harrington, 1962), which would motivate President Johnson’s “war on poverty” a decade later (Caro, 1982). There was blatant racial injustice that sparked the Birmingham bus boycott of 1955 and the modern civil rights movement (Branch, 1988). There was early government experimentation with LSD and its hallucinogenic effects (Lee & Shlain, 1992). There was the Korean War that raged from 1950 to 1955, during which General Douglas MacArthur rose and fell from power and popularity, Democratic President Harry Truman chose not to run for a third term, and America’s fear and hatred of communism strengthened (Brinkley, 1998; McCullough, 1992). At center stage, leading the public charge against communism was Wisconsin’s Senator Joseph McCarthy.

Although anticommunist sentiment predated McCarthy, it intensified in February 1950 when the senator claimed to have a list of 205 communists working in the State Department (Brinkley, 1998). In the following years, McCarthy would call into question the patriotism of many of America’s political figures, professors, writers, and actors through Senate committee hearings and public grandstanding. Time

would show that McCarthy did not actually have a list of communists. Eventually, the country had enough of McCarthy and his accusations, and after Senate hearings in December 1954, he fell from power into obscurity. But although McCarthy himself was gone, “he left a legacy of fear that permeated American society through the 1950s” (Donaldson, 1997, p. 87).

Carl Rogers (1902-1987) was one of many academics who questioned the growth of McCarthyism in the 1950s. In various articles and memoranda, he criticized reactionary tendencies in society. For example, when the University of Chicago’s progressive laboratory school was threatened by a critical report, he wrote the committee members a letter, saying, in part,

You feel that the solution for this situation is discipline by authority—giving up the democratic attempt. I can think of no better way of undermining the already badly shaken democratic philosophy of this country than to move the elementary schools in the direction of a more authoritarian philosophy. My own experience in working with individuals and groups leads me to believe that the solution lies in a direction which is diametrically opposed to yours. I feel the solution is to work toward a real democracy in our schools, with each individual genuinely participating in responsible choices. I would replace “democratic rituals” with real democracy rather than with authoritarianism. I would aim for responsible self-discipline, not for discipline imposed by “legitimate authority.” (Rogers, 1951b)

But Rogers was never a target of the witch hunters and red baiters, and during the 1950s, his reputation as one of the nation’s most prominent psychologists and psychotherapists continued to grow. In the 1940s, his book *Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Rogers, 1942) had had a revolutionary impact, virtually founding the field of professional counseling and extending it to many helping professions (Capuzzi & Gross, 2001; Gibson & Mitchell, 1999; Gladding, 2000; Nugent, 2000). In the mid-1940s, he had served as president of the American Academy of Applied Psychology and the American Psychological Association (APA).¹ In 1951, his third major book, *Client-Centered Therapy* (Rogers, 1951a), was published, followed in 1954 by the research volume *Psychotherapy and Personality Change* (Rogers & Dymond, 1954). In 1956, he received the APA’s first Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award (APA, 1957). The following year, he became president of the American Academy of Psychotherapists and published his landmark article, “The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality

Change" (Rogers, 1957). That year, Rogers decided to leave the University of Chicago and his work at the Counseling Center for a dual appointment in the departments of psychiatry and psychology at the University of Wisconsin. It was a great decade for Carl Rogers.

Symbolic of Rogers's stature in the world of psychology in the 1950s was his historic debate in 1956 with the leading figure in the behaviorist school of psychology, B. F. Skinner (Rogers & Skinner, 1956; Skinner, 1948, 1968). On that occasion, Rogers warned of the growing danger of governments using the behavioral sciences to exercise more effective control over their citizens. In his conclusion, Rogers stated,

It is my hope that we have helped to clarify the range of choice which will lie before us and our children in regard to the behavioral sciences. We can choose to use our growing knowledge to enslave people in ways never dreamed of before, depersonalizing them, controlling them by means so carefully selected that they will perhaps never be aware of their loss of personhood. We can choose to utilize our scientific knowledge to make men happy, well-behaved, and productive, as Skinner earlier suggested. Or we can insure that each person learns all the syllabus which we select and set before him, as Skinner now suggests. Or at the other end of the spectrum of choice we can choose to use the behavioral sciences in ways which will free, not control; which will develop creativity, not contentment; which will facilitate each person in his self-directed process of becoming; which will aid individuals, groups, and even the concept of science to become self-transcending in freshly adaptive ways of meeting life and its problems. (Rogers & Skinner, 1956, p. 1064)

What Rogers did not mention and what virtually no one at the time knew was that while Carl Rogers was voicing these noble sentiments and was becoming arguably the leading spokesperson for the emerging movement in humanistic psychology, he was also working with the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

Much has been written on the life and work of Carl Rogers (Evans, 1975; Kirschenbaum, 1979; Rogers, 1967; Rogers & Russell, 2002; Thorne, 2003). Although Rogers's many professional activities during the 1950s are well known, the story of his at least 5-year involvement with the CIA is barely known and has never been fully told. This article attempts to tell that story in the context of America during the 1950s, Rogers's academic career, and the mission of the CIA.

THE SOURCES

Because some readers may be inclined to react, “Carl Rogers . . . the CIA? I don’t believe it!” (indeed that was the authors’ initial reaction), an explanation of our sources may be helpful. Although leaks and investigations about CIA involvement in illegal and unethical activities had periodically occurred for some years, it was not until 1977 that John Marks, of the Center for National Securities Studies in Washington, D.C., dramatically exposed the CIA’s involvement in mind control and behavior control research. This led to the CIA’s admission of its involvement, a renewed congressional investigation, and the CIA’s releasing of university scientists who had worked with them from their pledge of confidentiality (Hinkle, 1978b). It was then that Carl Rogers, among others, gave separate interviews to Marks and his sister, psychologist Dr. Patricia Greenfield. Greenfield’s (1977) article appeared in the APA’s newsletter. Marks’s book, *The Search for the “Manchurian Candidate”: The CIA and Mind Control*, appeared in 1979 and included additional information on Rogers’s involvement. Although there are some factual errors about Rogers in these publications, the basic information about Rogers’s CIA involvement is credible and consistent with other sources. He never denied their essential content in the decade he lived after their publication. Some years later, Rogers hired Marks as a consultant to help plan one of the most important events in Rogers’s career, an international gathering in Rust, Austria, to reduce tensions in Central America (Rogers, 1986). Before beginning the work, which had absolutely no CIA connection, Marks reminded Rogers of the interview he had conducted 7 years earlier, and Rogers assured him there were no hard feelings, which again suggests that Marks’s account was essentially accurate (Marks, personal communication, December 9, 2005). Rogers would hardly have employed someone who fabricated facts about his CIA connection.

Other authors have tended to repeat, exaggerate, or misinterpret the Marks (1979) and Greenfield (1977) information about Rogers. Colin Ross’s (1997, 2000) work appears biased and hysterical but does contain a very useful, objective description of 149 projects funded by the CIA, Rogers’s projects in 1958 and 1959 among them.

In addition to these sources, we have included information based on decades of research on Rogers’s life and work, including the Kirschenbaum (1979) biography, *On Becoming Carl Rogers*,

and more recent information the authors have collected for an updated edition of the biography (Kirschenbaum, 2007). Documents in the Carl Rogers Papers at the Library of Congress have shed further light on the subject.

THE CIA AND MKULTRA

By 1945, the United States had become a powerful global force. With a gross national product of \$212 billion following World War II, America emerged from the war as an industrial powerhouse (Isaacs & Downing, 1998). So, too, did the Soviet Union emerge as a global power after World War II; however, the wartime alliance that both countries shared “had broken down amid a welter of suspicion, distrust, and conflicting interests once the war against the Axis was over and the enemy defeated” (Lane, 2001, p. 1). Both countries would continue to seek power and security in the years following World War II (Gaddis, 2001).

The rise of American power in the intelligence community came as a result of the development of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in June 1942. The OSS gave the “Joint Chiefs of Staff an intelligence arm for the first time,” and one they needed following the attack on Pearl Harbor (Lane, 2001). Smith (1997) stated that for the “first time in its history, [the United States] had a broad and deep intelligence capability” (p. 17).

Following the OSS, the CIA was formed in 1947 under the National Security Act to “collect and coordinate intelligence-gathering in foreign countries” (Brinkley, 1998, p. 467). One means of intelligence gathering was to question captured spies and enemy defectors. As might be expected, psychologists’ insights on questioning techniques, on uncovering the truth the individual may be reluctant to reveal, were valued and solicited by the CIA. Also of interest was psychological knowledge that might help the CIA understand “brainwashing,” that is, techniques to change a person’s belief, control a person’s thought processes, or get a person to carry out the controller’s wishes. Agency officials were convinced that the Soviet Union and communist China had, or might soon have, powerful brainwashing techniques and witnessed the 70% of 7,190 American Korean War prisoners held in China who made confessions, denounced their country, or signed petitions against the U.S. role in the war, many of whom even held on to their beliefs after they were repatriated

to the United States (Marks, 1979; Thomas, 1989). Hence, the CIA was committed to doing whatever it took to learn as much as possible about psychological processes that might facilitate or resist brainwashing and other forms of psychological persuasion. When the hot war ended in Korea, "cold war" concerns about the Soviet Union and communist China's publicly stated intention to spread communism internationally reached fever pitch, and the CIA became interested in any and all psychological methods for information gathering, propaganda, persuasion, and control (Jeffreys-Jones, 2003).

Thus, within a few years of its creation, the CIA was involved with drug experiments, the use of hypnosis, and behavior-control programs, activities that continued for many years (Marks, 1979). Lee and Shlain (1992) suggested that the governmental experimentation with drugs was not the sole property of the CIA; rather, this type of activity was a continuation of the efforts of the OSS. Furthermore, Lee and Shlain stated that, years earlier, OSS scientists created a powerful cannabis extract designed to act as a truth serum.

One CIA program named BLUEBIRD spawned the formation of interrogation teams consisting of a psychiatrist, a lie detector and hypnosis expert, and a technician to "check out agents and defectors" (Marks, 1979, p. 24). Eventually, the BLUEBIRD project would be renamed ARTICHOKE because of a change in leadership, and in turn both projects were rolled into a new project called MKULTRA on April 3, 1953 (Marks, 1979; Ross, 2000). According to Lee and Shlain (1992), "MKULTRA was the brainchild of Richard Helms, a high ranking member of the Clandestine Services (otherwise known as the "dirty tricks department") who championed such methods throughout his career as an intelligence officer" (p. 27).

Greenfield (1977) quoted a CIA memo describing how MKULTRA explored "avenues to the control of human behavior," including "chemical and biological materials capable of producing human behavioral and physiological changes . . . radiology, electroshock, various fields of psychology, psychiatry, sociology and anthropology, graphology, harassment substances, and paramilitary devices and materials" (p. 1). Ross (2000) documented that MKULTRA was the umbrella for 149 "subprojects" that covered a wide range of topics, including but not limited to the effects of LSD and other drugs, hypnosis, stress, and sensory deprivation. In many of these projects, the participants were unknowing or unwilling participants—research that would be illegal or at least highly unethical today.

During this period, Harold Wolff, a neurologist at Cornell University Medical College, was treating CIA Director Allen Dulles's son for an injury he had sustained in the Korean War. A close friendship between Dulles and Wolff developed (Marks, 1979). Therefore, it was Wolff to whom Dulles turned when he wanted studies done on brainwashing (Greenfield, 1977; Marks, 1979). In 1953, Wolff, along with his Cornell colleague Lawrence Hinkle, began studying communist brainwashing techniques (Wolff & Hinkle, 1956). By 1955, the Wolff-Hinkle study was in its last year, and Wolff's desire to increase his role in CIA research was growing (Marks, 1979). He convinced the CIA to fund a grand scheme to gather and generate scientific knowledge on "how a man can be made to think, 'feel,' and behave according to the wishes of other men, and conversely, how a man can avoid being influenced in this manner." (Marks, 1979, p. 158)

Under the larger umbrella of MKULTRA activities, the Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology was incorporated by Harold Wolff in 1955. The society, according to Greenfield (1977), was a "key instrument for sponsoring basic research in psychology, sociology, and anthropology" (p. 10). In fact, the research ranged from basic to applied, from topics not remotely connected to CIA interests to those directly commissioned by the agency. Basic research projects included a sociological study of Levittown, Long Island, the foreign policy attitudes of people who did and did not own fallout shelters, and the effects of circumcision on Turkish boys (Marks, 1979). These were "cover projects" that gave the society an air of scientific respectability and diversity. Their principal investigators had no idea of the real source of their funding. Other society projects were more directly connected to agency concerns. Some might appear fairly innocent on the surface, such as an MKULTRA-sponsored series of annual conferences funded through the Josiah Macy Foundation, on "problems of consciousness," in which the likes of Margaret Mead and Jean Piaget participated while the CIA organizers took copious notes (Marks, 1979, p. 69). A less innocent society project took place at Ionia State Hospital in Michigan. The focus of this project was to test the effects of LSD, marijuana, and hypnosis on sexual offenders, both with and without their knowledge. The society reasoned that the resistance of sexual predators to admit their reasons for committing crimes could be likened to spies withholding secret information. Other projects involved interviewing foreign students and defectors from communist countries to gain insights into how future secret agents might be recruited.

Until 1957, the society had been housed within Cornell Medical College in New York City. (Interestingly, Rogers's son David was associate professor of medicine at Cornell at the time and chief of the Division of Infectious Diseases at New York Hospital–Cornell Medical Center.) However, as Marks (1979) explained, the society began to outgrow Cornell and the need for such institutional cover. Greenfield (1977) quoted minutes from a 1956 CIA meeting that suggested that conducting outside research was too difficult under the auspices of Cornell and that the society should be separated from the college. With James Monroe as its new director, the society moved to nearby Forest Hills, New York, and continued its work. Structurally, Wolff stayed on as president, and Hinkle became vice president. A new board of directors was formed consisting of Harold Wolff; Lawrence Hinkle; earlier board member Dr. Joseph Hinsey, head of the New York Hospital–Cornell Medical Center; and three new members—John Whitehorn, chairman of the psychiatry department at Johns Hopkins University; former Assistant Secretary of State Adolf A. Berle; and renowned psychologist Carl R. Rogers (Marks, 1979; Thomas, 1989). Future board members would include Leonard Carmichael, head of the Smithsonian Institution and former APA president; Barnaby Keeney, president of Brown University; and George A. Kelly, psychology professor at Ohio State University (Marks, 1979, p. 167). Apparently, Rogers was still on the board in 1961 (Ross, 2000) when the society changed its name to the Human Ecology Fund. The fund was finally disbanded in 1965 (Marks, 1979).

CARL ROGERS AND THE CIA

Four questions might be explored relative to Rogers's participation with the CIA, the Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology, and MKULTRA: *How* did Rogers become associated with the CIA? *What* was the nature of his own CIA-funded research? *Why* did Rogers accept the invitation to participate? And *how much* did Rogers know about the other research projects of the society and MKULTRA?

How?

How Rogers became associated with the society and the CIA is fairly clear, except for a few inconsistent details. In a memorandum

dated November 1956 to Lawrence Kimpton, chancellor of the University of Chicago, Rogers wrote,

Dr. Harold Wolff of Cornell Medical School is one of the world's leading authorities in psychosomatic medicine. He has been a serious student of my work and knows it very well. A week ago he asked me if I would serve with him as a consultant to the Department of Defense on a top-secret matter having to do with mental health. He said, "I am asking the five top-ranking men in the country in this field to serve on this task. You are one of the five, and I hope you will serve." (Rogers, 1956)

Rogers's statement in this memo is consistent with the 1956 CIA meeting minutes cited earlier. It seems plausible that if the decision was made to separate from Cornell, line up a new board of directors in 1956, and establish the society as an apparently independent foundation in 1957, Wolff would have contacted Rogers when he did to give him time to make a decision and prepare for board membership.

A somewhat different story of Rogers's entrée into the society was told by Greenfield (1977). According to an interview excerpt in that article, Rogers stated,

James Monroe came to me and told me that Dr. Harold Wolff, a neuropsychiatrist whom I had a lot of respect for, was heading up an organization to do research on personality and so on. Then he told me more and I realized that it had secret aspects to it. (p. 10)

Marks's (1979) explanation of Rogers's involvement with the CIA front organization was similar to Rogers's (1956) letter to Chancellor Kimpton. Marks stated that Rogers was asked by Wolff to become a board member, and, because of his respect for Wolff, he had "no objection to helping the CIA" (p. 168). Clearly, Rogers had some knowledge of the scope of what he was asked to do. Although some scientists were funded without knowledge of CIA and MKULTRA backing, Rogers seemed to have top-secret clearance for his work and knowledge of the CIA connection (Ross, 2000).

What?

According to Ross (2000), Rogers had two projects that were funded through the society. The first was Subproject 74 in 1958, which gave Rogers \$15,000 to study the "biological correlates of

emotion in psychotherapy clients" (p. 324). As Rogers (1958) wrote in his annual professional activities report for the University of Wisconsin that year, this seed money "permitted the purchase of equipment and the inauguration of the program" (p. 2). The bulk of funding needed to fully support this program, slightly more than \$100,000, was later obtained through a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health (Rogers, 1958).

Why would the CIA want to give money to Rogers to study "the correlation of psychological and physiological variables in personality and personality change," as he described it in his annual report? True, Rogers and his colleagues had done a little of this work in Chicago—for example, measuring clients' levels of stress and excitation (e.g., anxiety) before, during, and after therapy—but such research was never a great focus or interest of his. Nevertheless, we can speculate that the agency, intensely interested in methods for ascertaining the truth or falsity of participants' statements during interrogation, might have wanted to learn from Rogers anything he knew about attaching electrodes to patients to ascertain their inner states. In this case, Rogers would have been available as a consultant to the agency to pick his brain on this and related topics.

Although Rogers did not know very much about measuring physiological states, that would not necessarily have mattered to the CIA. According to Marks (1979), this was standard agency practice. In return for a small grant, they in effect would have a scientist on retainer, giving agency staff access to the scientist's knowledge and to that scientist's network of associates. Other prominent scientists who served as consultants to the society in this manner or who had basic research projects funded by the society included psychologist and former APA president Charles Osgood, psychiatrist Martin Orne, social psychologist Edgar Schein, sociologist Jay Shulman, anthropologist Edward Hall, and, not surprising given his comfort with the control of human behavior, B. F. Skinner. Having luminaries such as these on the payroll in turn gave the CIA access to other scientists. "You could walk into someone's office and say you were just talking to Skinner," says an MKULTRA veteran. "We didn't hesitate to do this" (Marks, 1979, p. 171).

The evidence suggests that Rogers undertook this project at Wisconsin as a way of developing relationships with his new colleagues in the Department of Psychiatry. Once he obtained the funding and coauthored a research procedures manual with them

(Rogers, Roessler, & Greenfield, 1958), Rogers left the project on the physiological correlates of psychotherapy in their hands and worked on what he really cared about—a manual for studying process change in psychotherapy that he then used on his research project on psychotherapy with schizophrenic patients. When his colleagues held a conference and published a book on the physiological correlates of psychotherapy (Roessler & Greenfield, 1962), Rogers was not even mentioned.

However, in 1959, Rogers wrote a one-page, unpublished memorandum titled “Some Questions About Sodium Amytal (A Tentative Note).” In this note, Rogers (1959b) described his therapeutic relationship with a disturbed female client at Mendota State Hospital. Because of her violent outbursts and periods of distress, hospital staff had a policy of sedating her with sodium amytal. Rogers noted three things. First, when she was not sedated, she was often unwilling to speak with him. Second, when she was sedated, she was more willing to speak with him, but she was also much more incoherent. Third, the drug helped to increase her level of self-disclosure, but disclosures under the influence of the drug often left her feeling guilt stricken and remorseful. Rogers wrote,

I have no question about the use of this drug with this client when she is upset. It is necessary and helpful to calm her down. There are interesting questions raised, however, as to whether therapeutic interviews should be conducted while she is under the influence of Sodium Amytal or if they are conducted, how to keep them from having a later adverse effect. I might say that I have been very careful when I have noticed that she was all groggy to do nothing which would in any way probe or encourage her to reveal material. I simply accept what she is willing to reveal without any pushing even of a subtle sort. I think the adverse results would be intensified if there had been any pushing or probing. (1959b, p. 1)

This note suggests that although the CIA may have been interested in the use of drugs to get people to reveal as much as possible, Rogers apparently was not. Rogers in this case seemed to be following his typical approach to documenting new and interesting findings and, by refusing to coerce his client, maintained his allegiance to his theoretical and therapeutic values.

Rogers's second society-funded project was Subproject 97 in 1959. Another \$8,750 was granted to him for the study of “personality change in psychotherapy of schizophrenics” (Ross, 2000, p. 326).

Again, Rogers (1959a) affirmed this in his annual university activities report, writing that the "Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology gave a grant of \$8750 to provide support while larger amounts are being sought" (p. 4). A possible discrepancy with these figures can be found in Marks (1979), who stated that Rogers's grant or grants from the society provided him with a total of roughly \$30,000 during three years, possibly referring to both projects. This amount may have come from Rogers's recalling an approximate figure some 20 years later. In any case, Rogers's grant allocations were well below the mean for individual grants. Using the MKULTRA contract funding amounts found in Ross's text, we calculated descriptive statistics for 148 of the 149 subprojects (one had insufficient data). The mean for individual grant disbursements through MKULTRA was \$34,697. Funding amounts ranged from \$206 to \$400,000, and the sum of all MKULTRA disbursements was approximately \$5,135,097. Clearly, Rogers got a tiny share of the total.

In a footnote to a journal article, Rogers (1962) acknowledged the Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology for partially funding his work on the process of therapy with schizophrenics. We assume that this was Subproject 97. He stated that this work

should help to determine whether schizophrenic behavior is something different in kind from normal behavior, or only in degree; should throw further light on the nature of psychotherapy and the therapeutic relationship; should help to indicate whether psychotherapy can be made available to the person who has no conception of it, and no conscious desire for it; should add to our knowledge as to the process by which personality changes; should indicate whether this process is essentially the same in neurotic, schizophrenic, and normally adjusted individuals. (p. 57)

He acknowledged the society's help again in the introduction to his and his colleagues' subsequent book on psychotherapy with schizophrenics (Rogers, Gendlin, Kiesler, & Truax, 1967).

The work with schizophrenic patients was the work that Rogers moved to Wisconsin to do. It was the logical next step in his career and certainly not motivated by a few thousand dollars of CIA funding. Earlier, we briefly mentioned MKULTRA work with sexual predators that was conducted at Ionia State Hospital. In that work, it was thought that if one learned how to break down the defenses of those arrested for sex crimes, it might be possible to use the

same methods to break down the defenses of spies during interrogation. We consider it reasonable that Rogers's work with schizophrenics was viewed by the CIA in a similar way. Perhaps if one could find a way to get a person who was withdrawn or resistant or out of touch with reality and therefore not forthcoming with accurate information to open up and talk and share his or her true thoughts and feelings, such a method might just work with resistant prisoners, defectors, or enemy agents.

Rogers's work with schizophrenics outside the CIA context might seem worthwhile and admirable. However, this same work, when placed in the context of CIA mind control, may, to some, stain Rogers's image or raise questions about his motivations or ethics. Is it possible that Rogers, who personified prizing, accepting, and helping people, may have exploited a defenseless population in hopes of finding information that would aid governmental pursuits? Rogers and his colleagues (1967) wrote a 689-page book detailing their work with schizophrenic patients in Wisconsin. Dozens of others were involved in the project, and there has never been a suggestion that patients' rights were violated. In fact, when one of Rogers's own patients who had made terrific progress in therapy refused to take the final battery of tests, meaning his data could not be used, Rogers could have convinced him to take the tests but chose not to. It was a small study, and this one man's data would have significantly improved the results (Kirschenbaum, 1979; Rogers & Russell, 2002, p. 176). This research was arguably the major focus of Rogers's career at that point. Surely, he could have rationalized how his client's participation would not be harmful to him but would help others. Yet he put what he perceived to be his client's interest above his own.

Although there is no evidence that Rogers engaged in any unethical research practices himself on the society-funded projects, his participation with the CIA front organization makes him suspect to some critics. Ross (1997), an expert in the field of multiple personalities and trauma, reflects just this negative perception of Rogers's participation when he says,

Yes this is Carl Rogers of Rogerian psychotherapy fame. He was actually a spook psychiatrist with top secret clearance who was on the Advisory Board of one of the funding fronts and received funding for psychotherapeutic research on schizophrenia. It's a very funny thing that Mr. Friendly Carl was in the network. (p. 4)²

Rudmin (1999), repeating the Greenfield (1977) and Marks (1979) information, wrote, "Rogers' behaviour does raise some doubts about whether or not his philosophy, methods and writings can be trusted as guidelines for others to follow" (p. 77).

Along with such criticism come erroneous statements intended to portray Rogers's participation in a negative light. For example, Rudmin (1999) wrote that the "CIA gave Rogers \$30,000, which enabled him to leave academics and settle in sunny La Jolla, California" (p. 2). Rudmin cited Marks (1979), which gives support for the financial allotment, but Marks never asserted that Rogers used the money to relocate to La Jolla, nor did Rudmin provide any evidence of this. Actually, such an allegation is far-fetched. The grant money went to the University of Wisconsin, not Rogers himself. Rogers was financially well-off at the time (e.g., he often donated part of his \$25,000 annual salary back to the nonprofit group he worked for in California, the Western Behavioral Sciences Institute [WBSI]) and would not have needed this relatively small sum to move to California. Although WBSI had government contracts with the Office of Naval Research, the Air Force joint chief of staff, and other government agencies—working on basic and applied research on group processes and simulation studies (Raser, 1967)—they had no contracts with the CIA or other front groups, and the organization's president, Richard Farson, a close friend of Rogers, knew nothing of Rogers's participation with a CIA front organization then or at any other time (Farson, personal communication, November 10, 2005).

Why?

Such details beg the question of why Rogers *did* become involved with the CIA. Critics such as Ross (1997) and Rudmin (1999), quoted above, suggest that whatever the nature of Rogers's participation, the mere fact of his participation with the CIA front organization tarnishes his reputation. So why did he become involved?

As Rogers explained his motives to Greenfield (1977),

It was an organization that, as far as I knew at the time was doing legitimate things. . . . It's impossible in the present-day climate of attitude toward intelligence activities to realize what it was like in the 1950s. It seemed as though Russia was a very potential enemy and as though the United States was very wise to get whatever information it could about things that the Russians might try

to do, such as brainwashing or influencing people. So that it didn't seem at all dishonorable to me to be connected with an intelligence outfit at that time. I look at it quite differently now. (p. 10)

Or as he later told Marks (1979), "We really did regard Russia as the enemy" (p. 168). To this, he added that he would no longer touch covert funding "with a ten-foot pole" (Greenfield, 1977, p. 10).

This same sentiment was expressed by other society grantees, such as Edgar Schein, a well-known social psychologist at MIT's Sloane School of Management, who was a consultant to the society and was aware of the CIA connection. He recalled,

It didn't matter, because we were not seeing the CIA in any unusual or villainous or different role from the Navy or the Army or any other piece of the U.S. government. It's only in today's context that this even becomes an issue. . . . What people can't grasp is how much of a change there has been in the public attitude. The CIA was a hero, and the question of taking money from them wasn't by the remotest stretch of the imagination an issue. (Greenfield, 1977, p. 10).

Another grantee, Charles Osgood, recalled, "There was none of the feeling then of the CIA that there is now, in terms of subversive activities" (Marks, 1979, p. 169).

Aside from serving his country, Rogers recalled a second motive for becoming involved with the Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology. Speaking about his initial grants from the society, Rogers said,

We did get, I think, a couple grants from them, actually among the first money we got to do research on psychotherapy. It was research work we'd been trying to do for a long time but couldn't get money enough to do it. The fact that we got those grants, I think, helped us get a track record so that we began to get some other support. (Greenfield, 1977, p. 10)³

Marks (1979) reported that Monroe had made it clear that Rogers could expect funding support if he decided to be on the society board. Rogers stated, "That appealed to me because I was having trouble getting funded. Having gotten that grant, it made it possible to get other grants from Rockefeller and NIMH" (Marks, 1979, p. 168). Indeed, he eventually did bring in more than \$561,035 in independent funding at Wisconsin (Kirschenbaum, 1979). Marks went on to say that, although grateful for the seed

funding opportunity, Rogers emphasized “that the Agency never had any effect on his research” (p. 168).

Marks (1979) suggested that the society’s seed funding helped launch Rogers in his distinguished career, saying that Rogers “later would become famous for his nondirective, nonauthoritarian approach to psychotherapy” (p. 168). Actually, Rogers was already a star in the world of psychology when Wolff tapped him for this venture; that was exactly why they wanted Rogers for their board. Marks said as much when he advanced the theory that the content of Rogers’s work was not of interest to the society. Instead, they wanted him for his stature in the academic community (Arrigo & Wagner, 2005). Marks wrote, “His standing in the academic community contributed a layer of cover around the Society that Agency officials felt was crucial to mask their involvement” (p. 168). Greenfield’s (1977) contention was somewhat contradictory. She wrote,

While Rogers saw himself as being funded to study techniques and outcomes of nondirective therapy, the CIA seems to have had other ideas. A CIA memo from January 1960 says of Rogers’s research that it could provide a mechanism for evaluating certain techniques of influencing behavior. Rogers never saw the memo. (p. 10)

So although the CIA may have hoped to get some useful information from Rogers, this does not mean he fulfilled their expectations. Rather, the evidence from his career at the time suggests that he would not engage in unethical behavior to satisfy the CIA because his first priority was his clients.

How Much?

Finally, there is the question of what Rogers knew about the various MKULTRA research projects the society funded, some of which, unlike Rogers’s projects, involved illegal and unethical activities.

In his role as grantee, Rogers would be consulted on other projects. For example, Rogers recalled one meeting at which “he and other people in the field of personality and psychotherapy were given a lot of information about [the Soviet Premier] Krushchev.” Rogers said,

We were asked to figure out what we thought of him and what would be the best way of dealing with him. And that seemed to be an entirely principled and legitimate aspect. I don’t think we contributed very much, but, anyway, we tried. (Greenfield, 1977, p. 10)

In his role as board member, presumably, Rogers would know even more about society operations. In fact, CIA director Allen Dulles attended one of the first meetings of the newly expanded board (Marks, 1979), although it is not clear if Rogers attended that meeting. One would think that, as a board member, he must have been informed of at least the titles of the various society-funded research projects, so he must have known that, in addition to the more basic and benign research projects, there was experimentation with LSD, questioning techniques, and other less traditional and potentially problematic research topics. Perhaps board members were not given even this information and he agreed to simply support the work of the organization as a figurehead board member, trusting Harold Wolff as someone who would not fund illegal or unethical activities. Or perhaps he knew the general content of the research but not the details. For example, a proposal might request funding to study the effects of LSD on the self-disclosure or memory of college students, but it seems unlikely that the full board would be told that the college students were to be duped into the experiment and not informed that they would be receiving an experimental drug.

Indeed, Marks (1979) said that Rogers *was* merely a figurehead on the board, which could imply that he had little or no knowledge of the details of the various society-funded projects. With project headquarters in New York and Rogers in Wisconsin, his contact with society activities may have been minimal. On the other hand, fellow board member Adolf Berle knew enough of what was being proposed to have some reservations about joining the board and write in his diary, "I am frightened about this one. If the scientists do what they have laid out for themselves, men will become manageable ants. But I don't think it will happen." Yet Berle was based in New York and, unlike Rogers, was a close friend of Harold Wolff and had originally put Wolff in touch with the CIA (Marks, 1979), so he may have had more knowledge of the society's activities than Rogers did. Or maybe Berle's comment simply reflected Rogers's own misgivings about using science to control human behavior. Lawrence Hinkle told John Marks, when reviewing drafts of the latter's book before publication,

I should like to put in a good word for the other scientists such as Dr. John Whitehorn and Dr. Carl Rogers. . . . In my opinion these were men of the highest integrity. . . . I think that they relied upon the "bona fides" of Harold Wolff for guidance in these matters and

that they were in fact unaware of much of what was going on with the Society and its affairs. (Hinkle, 1978b, p. 8)

In the end, we simply do not know how much Rogers knew about the more dubious projects of MKULTRA. There is no evidence that he had such knowledge. But there is also no evidence that he did not. Because he was on the society's board of directors, he might have known. Therefore, the question has to be asked whether he knew or not. We present the data and possible arguments on both sides. At this point, we simply do not know the answer. We think this is the only honest approach to take.

DISCUSSION

There is room for speculation when considering Rogers's association with CIA research. Contradictory reports from several authors and from Rogers himself present a less-than-clear picture about his knowledge of society activities, the CIA's interest in his research, exactly how he came to be involved, and exactly how much money he was granted through the society. In spite of the various discrepancies and uncertainties, still a reasonably reliable picture of the events of the time emerges. But what does the story mean? Do these revelations change our basic view of Carl Rogers, the man or his ideas? Are there value judgments to be made?

In a 1978 letter from Lawrence Hinkle to Rogers's son David (Hinkle, 1978a), who had gone on to be dean of medicine at Johns Hopkins and was then president of the prestigious Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Hinkle wrote,

What you should know is that I find nothing in all this that reflects any discredit upon this University [Cornell] or upon men such as your father who agreed to participate with the "Society" in its early days. Quite to the contrary, as I think you will see, the University responded to a national request from people at high levels in our government and performed a very creditable service in producing a report under conditions that I would have to describe to you as about ten times more onerous and difficult as those that you and I recently had to deal with in the report that we evaluated for the Academy of Sciences. There were, I think, some misjudgments on the part of some people connected with this, and it is clear that some of the actors in this drama had personalities that were not easily malleable; but I think that everyone on the academic side, and most of those that I knew on the CIA side, acted according to

his best judgment, in his own light and in light of the attitudes that were prevalent at the time.

Hinkle's words perhaps best describe the sentiment at the time and the feeling that if one turned down an invitation to work on a project that might protect the United States, that person was unpatriotic. Of course that justification—"My country, right or wrong"—has been used throughout history to justify inexcusable behavior. It is a contextual argument for understanding the decision to join in an undertaking, but it is by no means an exoneration of illegal, unethical, or inappropriate behavior. So we are left having to determine not only from the perspective of the era but from contemporary historical and ethical understandings how to view Rogers's CIA association.

It is first important to understand that Rogers's professional life was punctuated by a series of involvements that demonstrated care and concern for his country, both indirectly and directly. Politically progressive as a rule, he believed in reform through democratic participation and problem solving. As mentioned earlier, he regularly questioned the antidemocratic tendencies of the McCarthy period. Most importantly, he supported person-centered, egalitarian power relationships in all aspects of his professional work. Humanists, including Rogers, "went about the task of exploring psychology's political implications rather explicitly . . . pledging that psychotherapy could help make the self both autonomous and mature, capable of living up to the ideals of democratic thought and action" (Herman, 1995, p. 266).

More directly, in the early 1940s, Rogers trained workers in the U.S. Bureau of Agricultural Economics to use nondirective counseling techniques to better understand attitudes of rural and urban populations on various topics of national significance in war time (APA, 1942). In 1943, he conducted a study of combat gunners returning from World War II, again using his nondirective interviewing methods to understand the posttraumatic stress symptoms (as they would be called today) and other adjustment problems and to make recommendations on how the Air Force might effectively use these combat veterans for the duration of their service (Rogers, 1944). From 1944 to 1945, he accepted a 1-year appointment as the director of counseling services for the United Services Organization (USO), training thousands of USO workers how to counsel and help returned servicemen through their difficult adjustment back to civilian life. Rogers wrote several

articles on returning servicemen for journals and magazines and with John Wallen wrote the book *Counseling with Returned Servicemen* in 1946.

In the 1950s, then, given the widespread concern over the communist threat, both real and exaggerated, it is not surprising that Carl Rogers would again agree to serve his country. That such service might also provide seed funding for the larger independent grants needed to support his own research on psychotherapy with schizophrenics added additional motivation.

Should he have known or guessed or at least inquired about all the other projects supported by the Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology? Possibly. Nonprofit law has progressed in recent decades to the point that it is well understood that board members have a legal responsibility to exercise due diligence in ensuring that their organizations are not engaged in financial or other malpractices. If they are found to have been negligent in their duties as board members, they can be held responsible for the organization's actions. Therefore, one could argue that Rogers should have known what all the society-funded projects were up to and that Rogers should not have relied on Harold Wolff or CIA-hired society officials to vet such projects and tell the board only what they thought the board should know. Rogers was not naïve about such matters. He would have known, for example, of German medical experiments on concentration camp victims during World War II. As he acknowledged in his debate with B. F. Skinner at the very same time he was taking funding from the CIA,

In Skinner's presentation here and in his previous writings, there is a serious underestimation of the problem of power. . . . To hope that the power which is being made available by the behavioral sciences will be exercised by the scientists, or by a benevolent group, seems to me a hope little supported by either recent or distant history. It seems far more likely that behavioral scientists, holding their present attitudes, will be in the position of the German rocket scientists specializing in guided missiles. First they worked devotedly for Hitler to destroy the U.S.S.R. and the United States. Now, depending on who captured them, they work devotedly for the U.S.S.R. in the interest of destroying the United States, or devotedly for the United States in the interest of destroying the U.S.S.R. If behavioral scientists are concerned solely with advancing their science, it seems most probable that they will serve the purposes of whatever individual or group has the power. (Rogers & Skinner, 1956, p. 1061)

But that was then—Nazi Germany, World War II, and its aftermath. He might have known the CIA was experimenting with the effects of LSD on the human mind, but could he ever have imagined that they would use it with unknowing and unwilling participants? Outside the CIA context, could he ever have imagined the likes of the Tuskegee experiments in Alabama, then in their 20th year, in which poor African American individuals with syphilis were denied treatment to study the course of that disease (Jones, 1993)? Such a possibility was unthinkable. After all, this was America in the 1950s.

Carl Rogers is well known for his person-centered approach to psychotherapy and helping relationships and for his extensive array of research and writing on many topics in psychology and education. He wrote many autobiographical essays that were published and, especially later in life, gave many taped, autobiographical interviews. It is noteworthy that in all these autobiographical essays and interviews, he never mentioned a word about his association with CIA research. The two times he apparently did discuss it were when interviewers specifically asked him about it. He never voluntarily mentioned the topic on his own—not even to his biographer, who at the time had no reason to ask and who completed his work just before the CIA revelations came to light. Perhaps, in the grand scheme of Rogers's life, it was not a big deal, and he thought it hardly worth mentioning. More likely, he may have felt that his work with the CIA had been secret and that he was honor bound to maintain the confidentiality, until the CIA's MKULTRA activities were exposed by Marks (1979) in 1977 and the CIA released its university collaborators from their confidentiality agreements (Hinkle, 1978a). Perhaps also by then he recognized that his involvement with the CIA, unless fully understood in its personal, professional, and historical context, could too easily be misunderstood, taken out of context, and misrepresented to the detriment of his reputation and his life's work. Indeed, that is the danger in our now retelling the story, more fully than ever. But as Rogers used to tell his students when a research project yielded unexpected results and they were tempted to dispute the findings, "Don't you see? Facts are always friendly. They will lead us to some further step" (Gendlin, quoted in Kirschenbaum, 1979, p. 205). It is with that belief that we conclude this history, at least for now. No doubt there is more to the story still to be discovered. Whether new information changes the essential meaning remains to be seen.

And what *is* the meaning? On an obvious level, it is a reminder that psychologists and scientists should always be vigilant about their ethical practices and the ways their work may be used by those with their own political, economic, or social agenda. It is always good to recall that things are not always as they appear to be, even in *21st century* America and elsewhere.

Less obviously, possibly we have here a lesson in historical contradictions and ironies. One irony is that at a time when behaviorism dominated academic psychology, it was the CIA that became arguably the main supporter of research on human subjective phenomena—beliefs, perceptions, values, and inner states of consciousness. Another is the Rogers and Skinner juxtaposition. Although Rogers had commented on issues associated with the use of science earlier in his career, it was only after the Rogers–Skinner debate in 1956 that Rogers became a leading cautionary voice in the behavioral sciences against the dangers of using science to control human behavior and in favor of using science to help free individuals to achieve their potential. Is it too much to speculate that his eloquence on this subject was enhanced by his years of service on the board of directors of the Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology? It would be ironic indeed if getting involved with the CIA helped propel Rogers into the role of spokesperson opposing governmental use of behavioral research to control its citizenry.

Finally, perhaps, this story gives us pause to reflect on a concept Rogers helped to popularize and harness for the helping professions—empathy. He taught us that it is easy to judge but a lot harder to truly understand someone from his or her own perspective. The story of Rogers and the CIA gives us an occasion to practice the art of putting ourselves in another's place and answer the question: If *I* were in Rogers's shoes at the time, without the benefit of historical hindsight, what would *I* have done?

NOTES

1. Rogers's biographical information is from Kirschenbaum (1979, 2007), unless otherwise indicated.

2. Colin A. Ross's claim that Carl Rogers had top-secret clearance is based on his archival research of 15,000 pages of documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. Ross (1997) stated,

When you go through these documents, all these names are whited out. You have to piece it together from here and there. It's a great big story trying to track it all down. When you get a file on one of these sub-projects, there is usually a page in there that has standardized wording about no individuals associated with this project are witting or so and so whose name is whited out has top secret clearance and is aware of agency involvement. (p. 4)

3. Either Rogers did not fully explain himself or Marks misunderstood, as Rogers had received more than \$650,000 in prior funding at Chicago from the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, the U.S. Public Health Service, and other sources for his research on psychotherapy (Kirschenbaum, 1979, 2007). Rogers must have said or meant "research on psychotherapy *with schizophrenics*."

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